



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

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PRESS RELEASE

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Work begins on Panhandle's first Texas State Veterans Home

Will offer long-term, skilled nursing and certified Alzheimer's care at affordable prices

AMARILLO — Panhandle residents turned out today for the groundbreaking of Amarillo's Texas State Veterans Home, which will provide affordable nursing care for Texas veterans and their spouses. When the facility opens in early 2007, it will be the seventh Texas State Veterans Home.

"Folks from the Panhandle have a long history of serving our nation," said Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office and Chairman of the Texas Veterans Land Board. "With so many veterans living in this area, it made a lot of sense to build one here. We're really heartened by the support this home is getting from the community."

Patterson was joined at the ceremony by Amarillo Mayor Debra McCartt, state Sen. Kel Seliger, state Rep. John T. Smithee, Texas Veterans Commission Chairman Leo Barraza, Potter County Judge Arthur Ware and Randall County Judge Ernie Houdashell. A number of veterans also attended the ceremony, as well as Panhandle-area health care providers and educators.

The groundbreaking was especially poignant for family and friends of Mike Ussery, the recently deceased Veterans Land Board member from Amarillo who championed the building of a Texas State Veterans Home here.

"Mike was so excited about the Amarillo home, and he really wanted to be here today. In some ways, I think he was," said Patterson, who served with Ussery on the Veterans Land Board. "Mike was instrumental in securing this facility for his hometown. The Land Board will strive to make the home a place of healing and comfort for those who served our nation honorably. Our ceremony today is a tribute to Mike Ussery's tenacity and perseverance on behalf of his fellow veterans."

As a state senator, Patterson authored the legislation that created the Texas State Veterans Home program. Upon taking office as Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office in 2003, Patterson's first act was to call together the Veterans Land Board to approve locations for new Texas State Veterans Homes. The Board selected Amarillo, El Paso and McAllen to be the next host communities.

"I am committed to seeing these facilities be the best they can be," Patterson said. "For veterans in Texas, we intend to offer the best care anywhere."

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Construction on the Amarillo home should be completed in early 2007. It will have 120 beds, 30 of them certified for Alzheimer's care in a separate, secured unit. The home will serve as a model for future Texas State Veterans Homes, and will have sufficient utilities, laundry and kitchen facilities, as well as dining and common areas to care for 160 residents if future expansion becomes necessary.

Because the Department of Veterans Affairs subsidizes a significant portion of a veteran's cost to stay in a Texas State Veterans Home, the daily out-of-pocket rates are well below market average and include the cost of medications. A veteran currently pays \$63-\$74 a day for a semi-private room in a Texas State Veterans Home. The average cost for a semi-private room in a private Texas nursing home is about \$109 a day, which often doesn't include the cost of medications.

Spouses of Texas veterans and Gold Star parents are also eligible for care in Texas State Veterans Homes.

The Texas State Veterans Home in Amarillo will help the Veterans Land Board serve the more than 600,000 Texas veterans age 65 and over. According to the VA, in Potter and Randall counties alone, there are an estimated 6,300 veterans over 65 who will be able to take advantage of the many amenities the home will provide. Approximately 30,000 veterans live within a 75-mile radius of the Amarillo home site.

As of May 3, there were 105 certified Alzheimer's-care beds in Potter County nursing homes, and none in Randall County. More than 1,000 of the 19,000 veterans in Potter and Randall counties are thought to have the disease, and U.S. Census projections show the number of Americans with Alzheimer's is growing rapidly.

The Amarillo home will eventually employ about 100 full-time employees, including registered nurses, licensed vocational nurses, therapists, nurses' aides, laundry and housekeeping staff, activities aides, cooks and dietary staff.

Like all Veterans Land Board programs, Texas State Veterans Homes are self-supporting and cost Texas taxpayers virtually nothing.

The Texas State Veterans Home in Amarillo will join existing homes in Big Spring, Floresville, Bonham, Temple and McAllen. A new home is also set to open in El Paso next month. Each home provides long-term, skilled nursing care, comprehensive rehabilitation programs, special diets, recreational activities, social services, a library, and a certified, secured Alzheimer's unit with its own secured outdoor courtyard.

For additional information on Texas State Veterans Homes and special home, land and home improvement loans for Texas veterans, call 1-800-252-VETS (1-800-252-8387), or visit the VLB Web site at www.texasveterans.com. An event Web page is also available for photos and video from the groundbreaking ceremony at www.glo.state.tx.us/amarillo.

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